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ABSTRACT

The Family Support Act of 1988 presented states with a unique opportunity to address the needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare have seized this opportunity and are leading the nation in combining their programmatic and fiscal resources to expand the state's teen parent initiative. The enhanced services developed through the welfare initiative build upon a teen parent initiative first introduced through the Department of Education in 1985. This manuscript will highlight the systemic processes developed to actualize and support this coordination at the state and local levels including the evolution of the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative, funding strategies, the development of effective community-school partnerships, retrieval of teen parent dropouts, and development of innovative practices to keep teen parents in school. (Author)

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A Pennsylvania Education - Welfare Collaboration Model for Successful Teen Parent Programs

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ABSTRACT

The Family Support Act of 1988 presented states with a unique opportunity to address the needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare have seized this opportunity and are leading the nation in combining their programmatic and fiscal resources to expand the state's teen parent initiative. The enhanced services developed through the welfare initiative build upon a teen parent initiative first introduced through the Department of Education in 1985. This manuscript will highlight the systemic processes developed to actualize and support this coordination at the state and local levels including the evolution of the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative, funding strategies, the development of effective community-school partnerships, retrieval of teen parent drop-outs, and development of innovative practices to keep teen parents in school.

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INTRODUCTION

Experience has revealed that one of the critical factors in determining future success for a pregnant or parenting teen is the attainment of a high school education and diploma. Based on that premise and an intent to achieve institutional change to support pregnant and parenting teens, Pennsylvania introduced a school-based pregnant and parenting teen initiative administered by the Department of Education. Since that time the program has expanded to include forty-one school districts, twelve intermediate units and four vocational-technical schools. These programs serve 4,417 students in approximately one-third of the state's 501 school districts. About half of these students are eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). In addition, 3,329 infants and toddlers were served in the 1991-92 school year through school-based services including on-site childcare centers and laboratories.

Approximately 50% of teenagers who become pregnant drop out of school prior to graduation. In the 1991-92 school year Pennsylvania's program successfully retained an average of 92 percent of its program participants in school. In addition, with increased incentives, support and encouragement to return, 311 teen parents re-enrolled in school, citing the availability of on-site childcare as the reason for their return.

In 1991, as part of its JOBS program, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), introduced Project ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training). This program targets services for custodial teen parents below the age of twenty who are dependent on welfare and who have not achieved a high school diploma or its equivalency.

Project ELECT stands out as the product of a unique partnership between the departments of Education and Welfare. Rather than building a separate and parallel teen parent program, DPW chose to join forces with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to expand the capacities of existing teen parent programs; establish new programs in underserved and unserved areas; and develop and institute recovery programs designed to attract and serve teen parent dropouts.

The DPW chose to work with and through the schools for a member of reasons:

- Schools touch the lives of nearly all children.
- No other institution can match that level and scope of contact.
- They are ideally suited to act as host sites for services, and as facilitators or partners in their delivery.

As a result of this new program, fifteen school districts, intermediate units, and vocational schools were awarded grants through a competitive proposal process. These schools represent both rural and urban areas.

The delivery of services include building-based services, itinerant models, and alternative education programs reflecting the diversity of local planning efforts.

While each program is uniquely individual in its design, they are all based on several common themes. First, past failures in effectively meeting the needs of teen parents can be corrected through new philosophies and practices.

ELECT programs are required to demonstrate this through the provision of year round programming that extends beyond the school day and the school year. All programs provide on site childcare or have cooperative arrangements with local service providers to remove this most often-cited barrier to regular school attendance. Every program must identify its community partner(s) to ensure the provision of comprehensive services and correct the fragmentation and lack of access to community resources teen parents often face.

Allentown's program is called "Second Chance," with a noteworthy distinction. The "second chance" is for the schools as they attempt to more effectively work with and assist teen parent dropouts returning to complete their graduation requirements.

This program has placed great emphasis on developing both internal and external coordination of services for these youth. Through extensive

business education partnerships, the school has developed a program to deter second pregnancies. Local businesses support these conscious decisions and efforts on the part of teen parents with contributions used as incentives to improve student outcomes. The teen parents have become their own most effective recruiters and peer support system in this process. Internally, the district is partnering the ELECT program with its Family Center Project. The Family Center Initiative is a PDE-funded program which employs and extends the Parents as Teachers (PAT) model. This provides teen parents with home visits and ongoing information and skills training in child development, parenting education, health, and numerous other pertinent areas in addition to their academic program. This provides an extensive backdrop of services and support critical to helping teen parents remain in school.

Second, assessment is a critical component of recovery programs. Schools already possess the knowledge and tools necessary to assess a student's skill level and help her learn more about her own interests and abilities. By effectively using this information, students can make informed choices about course selections and use career exploration opportunities to plan for employment, job training, or further education after high school.

Third, teen parents sometimes need nontraditional and alternative options to successfully complete their high school education. Teen parents may lack credits necessary for graduation. Schools can develop individualized and alternative education programs to respond to these

issues. The development of summer programs for this population is one example of an effective response to this need.

Souderton School District developed and operated a summer program in 1992 that attracted teen parents in search of such an opportunity. Students earned credits in English, reading, and/or science. Counseling services and measures of academic progress were used to assist students in learning to make effective course selections for the regular school year program. These decisions were made in the context of post high school employment and career plans. As a result of this program, several teen parent dropouts re-enrolled in school.

The evolution of this remarkable initiative is marked by four critical stages of development:

Phase I -- a commitment to prescribing services and coordination rather than program design;

Phase II -- a charge, supported with funding, resources, and technical assistance, to encourage the establishment of on-site childcare services in the schools;

Phase III-- the establishment of baseline expectations for outcomes for programs and program participants; and

Phase IV -- the development of a model partnership between the Departments of Education and Welfare combining their resources and funding to support effective state programs.

PHASE I - Basic Program Development

From its inception in 1985 Pennsylvania's Pregnant and Parenting Teen program was based on five core service requirements:

- individual and peer group counseling services;
- career education counseling;
- nutrition and health education and services;
- community advisory boards; and
- demonstrated collaboration with local public and private service providers.

There were two underlying premises to these requirements. First, it was recognized that the needs of pregnant and parenting teens are varied and unique. Some students may lack health care resources, others may need childcare services, and still others may lack a stable home situation. To effectively respond to these differences, programs must be comprehensive and individually planned to meet each student's needs. The second premise was that a continuum of services already existed in most communities to meet these needs. The challenge was to teach and empower teen parents to effectively access and use available services and to sensitize community providers to the special needs of teen parents and the importance of their staying in school.

Local education agencies (LEA's) were given the latitude and flexibility to develop programs and service delivery systems that best suited their local needs and resources. The delivery system was

deliberately nonprescriptive to encourage local autonomy and ownership. The response was a variety of unique models, including single district programs and consortia serving multiple rural districts. Designs ranged from classroom-based programs with credit-bearing coursework to itinerant programs. Itinerant programs provide staff to travel to multiple building sites where smaller numbers of teen parents might not otherwise receive services. Often these are the most isolated youth who, absent program intervention, lack information and access to resources and services without the intervention of these programs. Many districts have developed courses for their teen parent population, providing actual skills training such as parenting skills, as well as knowledge-based coursework on topics such as health care and nutrition. Central to all programs is an assessment of services needed and assistance in learning to access available resources.

School districts conducted information meetings and met individually with public and private service providers to develop a community profile of existing services and needs of pregnant and parenting teens. This established an ongoing network for communication which served to sensitize providers about the teen parent population and provided a forum for problemsolving and developing systemic coordination. These efforts have produced a watershed of support and assistance. For instance, in many areas staff for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children WIC program conduct their monthly

interviews and educational group on site in the schools to minimize student absences. Additionally, a multitude of service agencies such as the American Association of University Women and local ministerial groups regularly donate clothing and baby furniture to school programs. Community resources such as county extension offices lend staff to the schools for class presentations and instruction.

Local communities can and will support an effective teen parent program when given the opportunity to clearly understand the program's mission and how services benefit not only the teen parents and their children, but also the community at large. Everyone benefits by preparing these youth to become self-sufficient adults and parents. Community advisory boards have proven to be the backbone of this type of information sharing and support. Through these boards, myths about teen parents are dispelled and replaced with the realities of the challenges they face in overcoming tremendous obstacles to succeed as students, parents, and citizens. Few statements can parallel the eloquence of a panel of teen parents addressing an advisory board, school board, or classroom of students about what they have experienced, learned, and hope to achieve. Advisory board members become the community advocates for these programs and generate a broad-based support network the schools could never achieve alone.

By requiring coordination and specific types of services, but not prescribing a program model, Pennsylvania charged its schools to

create community partnerships. What has resulted is a variety of effective community coordination models rather than duplication of effort.

PHASE II - On-site Childcare Services

Teen parents require available and affordable childcare if they are to remain in school. Child care is frequently not easily accessible and seldom is affordable for teen parents, particularly in rural areas. To combat this obstacle Pennsylvania has provided encouragement, support, and funding to schools to provide on-site childcare programs.

School districts responded to this challenge by developing on-site child care programs in a variety of ways. Some districts chose to act as their own providers, while others developed partnerships with public and private agencies. Under these arrangements the school provides space, while the providers accept responsibility for service provision and billing. The majority of these centers are licensed through the Department of Public Welfare. Those that currently are not licensed are working toward that end.

On-site child care programs were developed to maintain the teen parent as the person responsible for the care of the child, just as is the case with an adult parent. Through these experiences, teen parents were coached and supported in learning to plan for the day; to observe and share information with the program staff about the child's mood,

behaviors, health, and development; and to receive similar information back at the end of each day. Added benefits of on-site childcare include modeling of appropriate parent-child interactions by adult child care workers, "hands on" experience for teen parents, and early identification of health conditions and potential child abuse. Moreover, many districts and vocational schools use on-site child care centers to enhance coursework and activities in home economics and vocational child care programs through observation, practicums, and volunteer experiences for students.

Maintaining a consistent funding base for on-site childcare is critical for the continuation of these important services. Title IV-A reimbursements for child care and transportation are accessed for teen parents who receive AFDC, with a direct vendor payment system from the county assistance office established in several districts. The advantages of a direct vendor system include assurance and promptness of payments to the provider. Other funding sources include the Title XX Social Services Block grant, grants, district contributions and client payments.

Although the districts have done an excellent job in identifying and accessing resources to support their facilities, funding is often a struggle. School districts are hard pressed to commit diminishing educational dollars to non-academic services. Furthermore, Title IV-A reimbursements, which are based on a fluctuating population, do not provide a firm base for year-to-year support. For these and other

reasons, school-based child care programs prioritize teen parents for services, but many have also opened their services to school district staff and the community on a fee-for-service basis. This yields a two-fold benefit: broader funding base for the child care program and expanded access to daycare in largely rural communities.

When teen parents begin bringing children to school for child care services, transportation is an accompanying issue. In Pennsylvania local school boards have the authority to decide whether children of teen parents may ride on school buses. Several schools have chosen to do this. Many do not choose to exercise this option because of the costs associated with converting buses to meet infant transportation safety regulations and associated difficulties in bus routings. Instead, most districts responded to transportation needs by designating a van service, contracting for taxi and bus service, and by helping students identify and develop family resources. Services are designed to support teen parents as the decisionmaker by providing information to assist them in identifying their options and evaluating the potential results of their decisions.

PHASE III - The Establishment of Outcome Expectations

Successful programs must be able to demonstrate their effectiveness. While schools submitted annual summary reports describing their programs and services, there were initially no clear guidelines for expected outcomes.

In 1988 a subcommittee of program coordinators met with PDE and technical assistance staff to review and assess the summary reporting process. As a result of that meeting the summary report instrument was revised to include more outcome-based information regarding attendance and grade point average. Statewide expected outcomes were established for dropout and graduation rates. All programs now are expected to work to achieve a 90 percent retention rate, thereby decreasing dropouts to no more than 10 percent each year, and a 90 percent graduation rate for all seniors. Schools responded to these expectations with renewed efforts and commitments to further assist teen parents to stay in school. Recent curriculum changes in Pennsylvania, including moving from a credit-hour system to an outcome-based system, further support these efforts by allowing for more alternative crediting options and flexible scheduling.

The 1991-92 Summary Report for all programs yielded the following results:

Total students served:	4,417
Racial/Ethnic breakdown:	
Black	39%
White	55%
Hispanic	6%
Percent female:	91%
Percent of participating seniors who graduated:	85%
Percent of participating students who dropped out:	8%
Program retention rate:	92%
Number re-enrolled due to available on-site childcare:	311

The summary data is useful to identifying school districts experiencing difficulty in achieving the expected outcomes. Technical assistance,

including on-site visitations, resource development, and training, is provided to assist those schools in developing strategies to improve their effectiveness.

The Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative is supported through two, biannual statewide coordinator's meetings. These staff development programs provide information on emerging issues, skill building and program resources; and offers a forum for coordinators to network. Technical assistance is available year-round and acts as a central focus for program sharing and support. It has been a critical factor in facilitating program development and sharing.

PHASE IV - The Education-Welfare Partnerships

In response to the Family Support Act the Department of Public Welfare joined with the Department of Education to expand Pennsylvania's Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative. This partnership began through a series of planning and discussion meetings. As a result the departments designed a completely new proposal application, inviting schools to move to a new level of program development for services targeted for AFDC-eligible teen parents. Interested schools had to develop and emphasize outreach efforts, expand year-round services, and extend services and support beyond graduation to placement into employment, job training or postsecondary education. The resulting initiative -- Project (ELECT) -- has evolved as a model for ground-breaking coordination on both the state and local levels.

At the state level education and public welfare dollars are dedicated and matched by local school district funds to access Family Support Act monies. Without these joint fiscal commitments, the funding for this initiative would not be possible. The departments of Education and Public Welfare recognized that every action they took would either improve or impede direct services at the local level. Consequently, they deliberately worked at developing an interdepartmental coordination process that is the lifeblood and deciding factor in allowing local efforts to move forward, rather than simply designing duplicate programs. The departments share technical assistance services and communication on a regular basis. Trainings, conferences, and site visits are jointly planned and conducted as part of this process.

Each department is responsible for communicating with the other on a regular basis and then disseminate that information appropriately throughout their own systems. This creates an unbroken circuit for problemsolving and sending out shared messages through two very distinct systems. One example of how effectively this process worked was the development of payment and attendance reporting procedures between schools and county assistance offices (CAOs) for child care services funded under Title IV-A. Schools and CAOs were simultaneously encouraged by their respective state departments to meet and develop local procedures. If this did not occur, either Department was able to advise the other that assistance was needed. Each department could then work through its own internal network to contact that local school and CAO office to explain, clarify, and encourage any necessary problemsolving.

As a result staff from school districts and CAOs began meeting and talking with one another, minimizing the need for more overt department intervention. This was a remarkable process that occurred district by district and county by county, with much less top-down imposition and a far more local control and commitment. Several features of this partnership help make these mirrored efforts work.

- Each Department has worked and continues to work to eliminate its own bureaucratic barriers;
- The departments both employ the same technical assistance program for their teen parent programs. This provides a common conduit for integrating the priorities and requirements of these variously funded programs. Schools have one recognized contact for program assistance. Problems can be flagged for both departments simultaneously. This also provides a clearinghouse for information, resources, and program sharing.
- Teen parent program coordinators meet bi-annually for training, information, and networking purposes. These meetings provide a forum for the departments to jointly and individually address topics and gather input and feedback.
- The departments have jointly shared and developed resource materials to support teen parent programs. Guides for schools have been written to explain the program and how it applies to teen parents. Reporting forms have

been shared, combined, and jointly developed to prevent unnecessary and duplicative paperwork.

- Each department has scheduled and continues to schedule information presentations to audiences within their respective system to maintain a general level of awareness and understanding about these programs.
- The departments are planning a statewide conference for May 1993 focused solely on teen parenting issues.

These efforts and accomplishments are the result of a remarkable partnership that continues to evolve at both the state and local levels. The practices that have emerged are neither mysterious nor formidable. They are easily employed and can be easily replicated. The departments have joined together in a shared commitment, developed a communication system between themselves and with their local service providers, and completed the circuit with shared technical assistance. Through these efforts, a remarkable level of state and local coordination is occurring for the benefit of teen parents throughout Pennsylvania.